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TAGS: SENV ECON ENRG

SUBJECT: DIMAS SEEKS CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE

REF: BRUSSELS 449

Classified By: EEST Chief Louis L. Bono for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Econoff met with Andreas Papaconstantinou, a member of Environment Commissioner Dimas' staff, on 27 March.

Papaconstantinou confirmed what we recently reported (reftel) that Commission President Barroso is seeking to play a major role in the climate discussions. He confirmed that Matthew Baldwin, a member of Barroso's staff, will be shepherding Commission policy/actors in this process. He noted that Barroso's role would be focused on the leaders meetings, such as the MEF and the G-8, but Dimas would remain a central figure in the UNFCCC process. He indicated that Environment Director General Falkenberg, whom he described as &ambitious8, would also be engaged in the UNFCCC process, but he added that Falkenberg has a steep learning curve having just transferred from DG Trade. He was not aware that Falkenberg had planned a second visit to Washington in early March to meet with SE Stern, ahead of the troika meeting.

¶2. (C) On the March meetings in Washington, he said they went very well. He noted that SE Stern was clearly in the role of a negotiator, and seemed pleased to hear our readout that Dimas was less critical than his EU colleagues of U.S. midterm goals. Referring to the contentious discussion between Dimas and his NSC counterpart during the March 2008 High-Level Dialogue (HLD), he sought to counter the perception that Dimas would not be a good partner. He reiterated that Dimas is committed to cooperating with the U.S. and understands there are domestic challenges. He said Dimas is interested in holding an HLD meeting this year, but agreed that it should be scheduled at an appropriate point to further the UNFCCC agenda. He added that with three MEF meetings between now and July, it might be more constructive to hold the HLD in the autumn. (Note: DG Environment officers are keen to hold* but more importantly, publicly announce - that the HLD will take place before the U.S.-EU Summit in June. End note.)

¶3. (C) Although the term of the current College of Commissioners is due to expire on October 31, 2009, he is optimistic that Dimas will remain Environment Commissioner through Copenhagen. For starters, the current Commission could be extended to 2010 pending the prospects for implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. Even if the current Commission is not extended, he said Dimas has support in the Greek government and of Barroso (who remains a favorite to remain President) to continue at Environment. (Note: Papaconstantinou said that commissioners are typically given new portfolios for subsequent terms unless there is an important process, such as the COP 15, that would warrant continuity. End note.)

¶4. (C) Comment: We have stressed to Dimas staff on several occasions the need for constructive engagement, given the complexity of and limited time for negotiations. The message seems to have gotten through. Dimas is intent on concluding an agreement at Copenhagen and remaining a major player. In this respect, it appears that he is making a conscious effort to establish himself as a credible interlocutor for the U.S.

Murray